Three-Point Action Agenda for the Muslim Ummah

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Translator's Note

The ideas and arguments put forward in this booklet were originally presented by Dr. Israr Ahmad, Ameer of Tanzeem-e-Islami, in his numerous lectures, particularly two of his public speeches delivered at Karachi in 1985 and 1990. Despite this gap of five years, the two lectures were published together in Urdu on account of their common purpose and subject matter, which is to educate and enlighten all those who profess to be Muslims regarding the responsibilities of the Muslim *Ummah* as a whole, as well as the duties of its individual members.

The issues that are discussed in these lectures revolve around three *ayaat* of the Holy Qur'an, which occur in the middle of its third Surah. The remarkable feature of these *ayaat* is that they describe, in just a few words, the entire plan of action that must be adopted by Muslims if they are to succeed in the Hereafter and redress their continuing humiliation in this world.

The present English translation, being a summary of the points covered in the public addresses mentioned above, was initially published in three issues of the monthly *Hikmat-e-Qur'an,* and now its revised version is being presented in the form of a booklet. It is hoped that this translation will go a long way in introducing the fundamental conceptions behind the establishment of Markazi Anjuman Khuddam-ul-Qur'an Lahore and Tanzeem-e-Islami — the spearheads of revivalist struggle initially in Pakistan and later spreading out to the entire world.

Absar Ahmad
December, 1997

بسم الله الرحمن الرحيم

Three *ayaat* (102-104) of Surah Aal-e-Imran are of immense significance as they contain in a nutshell the comprehensive three-point plan of action Muslims are commanded to undertake in order to attain terrestrial success as well as salvation and felicity in the Hereafter. These *ayaat* and their English translation are as follows:

﴿ يٰٓاَيُّهَا الَّذِيْنَ اٰمَنُوا اتَّقُوا اللّٰهَ حَقَّ تُقٰتِهٖ وَلَا تَمُوْتُنَّ اِلَّا وَاَنْتُمْ
مُّسْلِمُوْنَ ۝ وَاعْتَصِمُوْا بِحَبْلِ اللّٰهِ جَمِيْعًا وَّلَا تَفَرَّقُوْا ص
وَاذْكُرُوْا نِعْمَتَ اللّٰهِ عَلَيْكُمْ اِذْ كُنْتُمْ اَعْدَآءً فَاَلَّفَ بَيْنَ قُلُوْبِكُمْ
فَاَصْبَحْتُمْ بِنِعْمَتِهٖٓ اِخْوَانًا ج وَكُنْتُمْ عَلٰى شَفَا حُفْرَةٍ مِّنَ النَّارِ
فَاَنْقَذَكُمْ مِّنْهَا ط كَذٰلِكَ يُبَيِّنُ اللّٰهُ لَكُمْ اٰيٰتِهٖ لَعَلَّكُمْ تَهْتَدُوْنَ ۝
وَلْتَكُنْ مِّنْكُمْ اُمَّةٌ يَّدْعُوْنَ اِلَى الْخَيْرِ وَيَاْمُرُوْنَ بِالْمَعْرُوْفِ
وَيَنْهَوْنَ عَنِ الْمُنْكَرِ ط وَاُولٰٓئِكَ هُمُ الْمُفْلِحُوْنَ ۝ ﴾

(آل عمران ٣:١٠٢-١٠٤)

Believers! Heed Allah as He should be heeded, and see that you do not die except in the state of Islam.

And hold fast, all together, to the Rope of Allah (which He stretched out for you), and be not divided among yourselves; and remember with

> gratitude Allah's favor on you, for you were once enemies and then He joined your hearts in love, so that by His Grace you became brethren; and you were on the brink of the pit of fire, and He saved you from it. Thus does Allah make His Signs clear to you, that you may be guided to the right way.
>
> Let there arise from among you a band of people (i.e., a party) who invite people to all that is good, and enjoin the doing of all that is right and forbid the doing of all that is wrong. It is they who will attain true success.

These *ayaat* occur almost in the middle of the Surah Aal-e-Imran and as such occupy a pivotal position in the numerous themes with which the Surah deals. As is commonly believed by Muslims, every single *ayah* of the Qur'an contains both theoretical wisdom and practical guidance. Similarly, though the above mentioned three *ayaat* too have philosophical points of wisdom or theoretical *hikmah*, I shall mainly dilate upon the practical guidance provided by them. I personally believe that pure academicism or too much philosophical or critical acumen exercised in understanding a particular point quite often hides from the scholar the concrete and practical guidance contained therein. Moreover, what the Muslim *Ummah* as a whole needs today is a clear and precise perception of the religious obligations and imperatives and a resolve to act upon them in the right earnest.

* The first *ayah* tells the Muslims very precisely, and yet very comprehensively, the obligations which they have to fulfill as members of the Muslim *Ummah* —

the priorities in the conduct of life and the value-structure to be upheld during the course of this-worldly life.

* The second *ayah* enlightens the Muslims about the binding-force which unites and welds them into an *Ummah* (a religious fraternity) – the instrument which turns them into a disciplined community with a common aim.

* The third *ayah* delineates the objective and goal of the Muslim *Ummah* in general and that of the activist Islamic group or *hizbullah* in particular. In other words, it deals with the question: What is the mission and the target for which the *Ummah* has to strive?

One can very easily see that there is a strong logical relationship between these three points. Every organizational effort or collectivity depends ultimately upon the individual members – their existential commitment to the group's world-view and determination to act accordingly. How can a group or a collectivity proceed in the right direction unless its individual members act and behave in the right manner? If individuals do not conduct themselves on the prescribed lines, how can the group as a whole work appropriately and achieve its envisaged targets? It is quite logical, therefore, that in organizing a collective effort the individual person himself comes first. In the context of Islamic *Ummah's* mission and goal, the foremost point is that an individual Muslim should realize and perform his religious obligations. He should be quite clear as to what Islam requires him to do, and he must fulfill those requirements.

Let me illustrate this point with the help of an example. Suppose a person has to ascend a platform which has three steps. The surest and safest way for him will be first to rise up to the first step, then to the second and finally to the last. If, on the other hand, he tries to jump at the top he is most likely to fall down, thus failing to achieve his target. The *ayaat* cited above similarly unfold before us three steps or stages through which Muslims should pursue their *ummatic* goal.

So let us focus our attention on the first *ayah* that reads:

Believers! Heed Allah as He should be heeded, and see that you do not die except in the state of Islam.

Here two points are noteworthy before we embark upon an in-depth analysis of the contents of the *ayah*: First, almost two-third of the Qur'an consists of Makkan Surahs in which the expression "O Believers!" has not been used even once. This way of address was employed in the Medinan period when the Muslims had formally became a community. Thus this expression marked the formation of Muslim *Ummah* and Allah Almighty (SWT) used these words while addressing all the members of the Islamic polity.

Secondly, a major portion of Surah Aal-e-Imran was revealed in the third year after *Hijrah,* immediately after the battle of 'Uhud (Shawwal, 3 A.H.). If one tries to visualize, with the help of authentic historical accounts, the state of the Muslim community at that time in Medinah, one sees that the faith and belief of the community presented a wide

spectrum. At the one end of that spectrum were true, staunch, and pious believers (among both *Ansar* and *Muhajiroon*) the depth of whose inner certitude and unflinching belief (*Iman*) was fathomless, whereas at the other extreme were those who lacked firm commitment and dedication to Islam — the vacillating and faint-hearted among the Prophet's (SAW) followers. The highest degree of this attitude was exhibited by those whom the Qur'an terms as *Munafiqun* – people who had rancor or hatred against true Muslims and suffered from incredulity, impiety, shiftlessness, and dissimulation. The important point to note, however, is that these people were never treated as a separate group; rather they were included among the Muslims and the address starting with the expressions "O Believers!" also covered them. This point has far reaching implications. Legally, even the hypocrites are to be treated as Muslims in an Islamic society as they profess the Oneness of Allah (SWT) and prophethood of Muhammad (SAW). That is why in the whole of the Qur'an we do not read even once the words "O Hypocrites!" even though a complete Surah entitled "Al-Munafiqun" (the Hypocrites) deals with the wiles, plots, and false pretexts of the dissemblers, whom the Holy Book likens to propped-up timbers. At other places the hypocrites, faint-hearted, and weak-willed Muslims are described as a menace to military discipline, quislings under pressure and vacillators always guessing at their shifting fortunes. All those who profess to have *Iman*, the Qur'an says, are not necessarily trule believers; many have diseases of feebleness or hypocrisy in their hearts:

> And there are some men who say: We believe in God and the Last Day; but they are not really believers ...in their hearts is disease.... (Al-Baqarah 2:8-10)
>
> The Bedouins say, We believe. Say: You do not (truly) believe, rather say, "We have (outwardly) surrendered" — for faith has not yet entered your hearts. (Al-Hujurat 49:14)
>
> O Messenger, let those who vie with one another in (the way of) kufr not grieve you, from among those who say with their mouths "We believe" while their hearts believe not.... (Al-Ma'ida 5:41)

So, here in this world, true and staunch believers as well as weaklings and hypocrites are all mixed together. However, Almighty Allah (SWT) will make a clear division between them on the Day of Judgment, when everybody will be rewarded on the basis of his belief and deeds (see Al-Hadeed 57:13). In other words, in this world a man's being Muslim (i.e., his verbal attestation of the basic beliefs of Islam and outward actions) is all that matters; but in the Hereafter only true and sincere belief — *Iman* — and deeds performed with the sole intention of pleasing Allah (SWT) will save one from the torments of hell-fire.

Turning now to the meanings of the *ayaat*, one notes that they address all who claim themselves to be believers, and the first demand that is made is: "O Believers! Heed Allah as much as He should be really heeded." This means that people who profess faith are being commanded to be true believers and to have fear and awe of Allah (SWT) to the utmost degree. The Arabic word *Taqwa* is very meagerly

transliterated in the English word "fear." Fear is obviously of many kinds:

* the abject fear of the coward;
* the fear of a child or an inexperienced person in the face of an unknown danger, more properly called dread;
* the fear of a reasonable man who wishes to avoid harm to himself or to people whom he wishes to protect;
* the reverence which is akin to love, for it fears to do anything which is not pleasing to the object of love.

The first is unworthy of man; the second is necessary for one spiritually immature; the third is a manly precaution against evil so long as it is unconquered; and the fourth is the seed-bed of righteousness and piety. Those mature in faith cultivate the fourth; at earlier stages, the third or the second may be necessary. But even here it is both fear and reverential awe of Allah (SWT). The first, on the other hand, is a feeling of which anyone should be ashamed. To respond to the call of Allah (SWT) and His Messenger (SAW) even after one has been smitten by injuries indicates that one fears God. *Taqwa* is indeed God-consciousness that makes a person righteous and pious. Steadfastness and perseverance in obedience and loyalty to Almighty Allah (SWT) necessarily characterize the pious (i.e., a *muttaqi*). According to the Qur'an, *Taqwa* is an all-embracing moral-cum-spiritual quality of the highest order — the inner driving force that keeps a Muslim on the right track.

Let us try to understand *Taqwa* a little further. *Taqwa* does not merely imply any particular form, appearance or life-style. Rather, it is a state of mind and heart which no doubt does reflect in every aspect of life. It permeates the whole being of a true believer; it is not a mere veneer or outward show. Essentially, it can be termed God-consciousness: a human being's awe of God, consciousness of one's duty towards Him, and an awareness of one's accountability to Him; to be conscious of the fact that the world is a phase of trial where Allah (SWT) has sent us for a specified period of time; that Allah's decisions on the Day of Judgment on an individual's future in the Hereafter will depend on how he makes use of his energies and capabilities in the period of time at his disposal in this world. A conscience which is fired by consciousness of Allah (SWT) becomes alive. Man's sensitivity becomes sharp under this influence and he avoids everything that is against Allah's will. He starts examining his own thoughts and feelings to see what tendencies are being nurtured within him. He begins to scrutinize his life to find out in what activities he is spending his time and energy.

Once the second Caliph Umar (RAA) asked Ubai Ibn Ka'b (RAA) as to how he would define *Taqwa* and what its essence is. Ubai Ibn Ka'b (RAA), acclaimed by the Holy Prophet (SAW) as a great scholar and reciter of the Qur'an, explained it in such a convincing and vivid manner that everyone of the Companions sitting in that meeting appreciated it. The explanation given by him may be paraphrased like this: If a man has to cross a jungle with thorny bushes on both sides of a narrow track, he will take extreme care and tuck

up his garments in order to avoid any harm to his clothes or to himself. This attitude of caution and care is to be called *Taqwa*.

Keeping this connotation of *Taqwa* in view, let us first understand what *Iman* or Islamic religions belief is. *Iman* signifies that a person has acknowledged the unity of God and believed in Him as the Creator and the Sustainer of the universe, one has testified to the Day of Judgment, and, finally, believed the messengership of Muhammad (SAW). This tripartite belief entails crucially important practical imperatives, which are, in the words of the Qur'an, as follows:

> So, obey Allah and obey His Messenger; but if you turn back, the duty of our Messenger is but to proclaim the Message clearly and openly. (Al-Taghabun 64:12)
>
> So take and put in practice what the Messenger assigns to you and deny yourselves that which he withholds from you.... (Al-Hashr 59:7).
>
> Then guard yourselves against the Day when one soul shall not avail another, nor shall compensation be accepted from her, nor shall intercession profit her, nor shall anyone be helped. (Al-Baqarah 2:123)

In a nutshell, the first and foremost demand of *Iman* on a Muslim is that he should have *Taqwa*. Not only does a person with *Taqwa* scrupulously avoid things which are explicitly prohibited, he also hesitates from getting involved in affairs which are in any way dubious or worthless. His sense of duty makes him fulfill Allah's commands in a spirit of total submission. His fear of God causes a feeling of deep

anxiety and agony whenever there is a possibility that he may be in danger of exceeding limits prescribed by Almighty Allah (SWT). Ensuring the discharge of his obligations towards God and towards his fellow-beings becomes his way of life; he shudders at the very thought of doing anything unjust and against the Islamic *Shari'ah*. He keeps a vigil on whatever his bodily limbs (arms, legs, eyes, ears, sexual organs) perform. He thinks himself accountable for all voluntary acts performed through them. Since, according to the Qur'an an angel always records whatever a man speaks out, a God-fearing man is vigilant about what he utters. This vigilance, control, concern, and caution are the hallmarks of the *Taqwa*-based attitude in life.

Again, the words which accompany and qualify the commandment for *Taqwa* are immensely noteworthy: "...as He should be heeded." While reciting this *ayah* we generally take a cursory and cavalier view of these words. How radically different was the attitude and response of the Companions of the Prophet (SAW) when they came to know of this challenging demand! They became extremely perturbed and thought that it was impossible for one to fear Almighty Allah (SWT) to the highest degree due Him. They, therefore, inquired from the Prophet about this and got consolation only when the following words of Allah, Most Merciful and Most Compassionate, were revealed: "So heed God as much as you can..." (Al-Taghabun 64:15). On hearing this, they were relieved of a terrible anxiety. Allah's *Taqwa* combined with "as much as you can" obviously means: "lead lives of self-restraint and

righteousness to the highest *possible* degree." And the Companions of the Holy Prophet (SAW) amply acted upon this Divine injunction. However, on our part we should not absolve ourselves of our obligation by underestimating our own capacities and capabilities. One should not deliberately forego the struggle for restraint and piety on the false (and self-deceiving!) pretext that he lacks the required mental and physical strength. The All-Knowing Allah (SWT) knows well how much strength and capability He has given to each person and everyone will be judged according to that measure.

Now let us discuss the second injunction contained in the *ayah*: "and see that you do not die except in the state of Islam." What does *Islam* literally mean? It means submission and surrender to Allah (SWT). Islam implies belief in the unity of God and the prophethood of Muhammad (SAW). Anyone who testifies to this belief fulfills the legal requirement for entry into the fold of Islam. This belief has very significant practical ramifications. The edifice of a complete Islamic life can only be built on a belief in God's unity (*Tauheed*) that permeates a person's entire personal and social life, and which is so strong that he considers himself and all that he possesses as really belonging to Almighty Allah (SWT); he accepts Him as the sole rightful Owner, Object of worship, Receiver of obedience, and Law-giver for himself as well as for the rest of the world; he considers Him the fountain-head of guidance, and is fully aware that disobedience to Allah (SWT) or indifference to the divinely revealed law constitutes deviation from the right path of Islam. Indeed, controlling the baser

prompting and desires of the self and always striving to act according to the dictates of the Qur'an and *Sunnah* of the Prophet is what Islam essentially means.

Moreover, the command given in a most emphatic style — "and see that you do not die save in the state of Islam" — is very significant and subtle. As a matter of fact, nobody knows as to how long he is going to live and where and in what conditions his death will take place. We often hear that a person travels in the morning to a certain place on a business or pleasure trip. His family members fondly expect him back after a few days, but instead in the evening of the very same day he left his house, his wife and children receive his dead body. Thus, if a person firmly decides that death does not take him except in the state of submission and total surrender to Allah (SWT), he will have to be extremely and ceaselessly alert so that not even a single moment of his life is spent in sinful activity. Nobody has any guarantee whatsoever that he is not to die at the time of indulging in sin and thus transgressing the limits set by the Qur'an and the *Sunnah*.

Many Qur'anic *ayaat* and *ahadith* emphasize that an un-Islamic act cannot co-exist with *Iman*, indeed to the extent that, at least while man is committing a sin, his *Iman* leaves him. Let me here quote a very authentic *hadith*.

> Hadrat Abu Hurayra (RAA) says that Allah's Messenger (SAW) said: While one is committing fornication, he is not a believer; while one is stealing, he is not a believer; while one is taking liquor, he is not a believer; while one is

> plundering, as people look on, he is not a believer; while one is committing fraud, he is not a believer; so beware, beware! (Bukhari and Muslim)

Leaving aside for a moment the arguments of the jurists and theologians about *Iman* and its relation to *a'maal* (actions), one must try to understand the matter in the light of the Qur'an. It is crystal clear from the Qur'an that the inner conviction of faith and the practice of Islam are essentially interdependent. Allah (SWT) almost invariably mentions faith and righteous conduct together. Verbal profession of Islamic beliefs, though important in its own right, is not sufficient for supporting the edifice of an Islamic morality and way of life and for winning him salvation in the Hereafter. Just imagine the utter misfortune of a person whose soul is overtaken by death while he is committing a grievous sin and no time is left for him to repent and make amends. This situation can only be avoided by a Muslim who makes Islam the ultimate, paramount and all-time concern in his life.

First things first. This, then, is the foremost and base-line practical step or action which a true Muslim has to undertake most earnestly. Without accomplishing this, he cannot fruitfully move on to the two higher steps of the action-agenda. Allah (SWT) castigates the religious divines of the Jews with severest reproach on this account thus:

> Do you enjoin right conduct on the people, and forget (to practise it) yourselves, and yet you study the Scripture? Will you not understand? (Al-Baqarah 2:44)

This attitude (of double standards) is also conspicuously visible in our own present day Muslim society. Many a preacher deliver moving and passionate sermons to others on religion and moral rectitude. A large group of spiritual mentors is seen engaged in Islamic *da'wah* activity across the Muslim world. High-quality and first-rate academic papers are being written and published by a host of scholars in the Muslim lands. Yet, on closer examination, one regrettably finds that most of these scholars, writers, and mentors do not practise Islam themselves. Their own lives and conduct, far from being based on *Taqwa* and *Iman*, exhibit many deviations from Islamic principles. Unfortunately, they forget that the first thing that Islam demands from them is to lead their own lives as much as possible according to the dictates of the Qur'an and the *Sunnah* of the Prophet (SAW).

The demand of the Qur'an as explained in the above lines is that we are required to worship and love Allah (SWT) with all our heart, with all our mind, and with all our strength. In Islam, the religious concern is ultimate, it excludes all other concerns from ultimate significance. The concern for Islam is to be unconditional: independent of any condition of character, desire, or circumstance. The unconditional concern is total: no part of ourselves or of our world is excluded from it, there is no place to flee from it. The total concern is infinite: no moment of relaxation and rest is possible in the face of a religious concern which is ultimate, unconditional, total and infinite. The Qur'anic *ayah*: "O Believers! Enter wholly in Islam..." (Al-Baqarah 2:208) means

exactly this. Allah (SWT) demands that man should submit, without reservation, the whole of his being and life to His will. Man's outlook, intellectual pursuits, behavior, interaction with other people and modes of behavior should all be completely subordinate to Islam. Allah (SWT) does not accept the splitting up of human life into separate compartments, some governed by the teachings of Islam and others exempt from them. Whether seen from the point of view of Islam or *Taqwa* (i.e., God-fearing attitude and God-consciousness), the Qur'an instructs us to believe wholeheartedly and to bow in submission and obedience to God totally and completely. It allows no fragmentation of life. *Taqwa* is an all-embracing moral quality of the highest order. It manifests itself in an individual's whole way of thinking and acting. The Qur'an emphasizes that the guidance given by Allah (SWT) cannot be split into parts – the peripheral, less important ones to be followed, the fundamental, more important ones to be put in cold storage. We can see with our own eyes in the lives of those who often enjoy great fame for their *Taqwa* that they are so particular about the minute details of the *Shari'ah* that deviation from the secondary injunctions of their own juristic persuasions is to them tantamount to heresy and threatened with hell-fire. But their neglect of the fundamentals of Islam – e.g., prohibition of interest in business and concern for economic exploitation and social injustice in society – reaches such heights that compromise and expediency seem to dominate lives.

Taqwa or God-consciousness must assert itself

both in public life and in the inner denizens of private life. In case it is shallow and fake, it will manifest only in the external veneer of living and conduct. Once the Holy Prophet (SAW) pointed to his breast thrice and said that *Taqwa* resides in here. If the heart of a man is enlivened by *Taqwa*, it will permeate his entire being and dye his total personality with the "color of Allah." A Muslim has been commanded by Allah (SWT) not only to pray and fast, but also to put in practice His injunctions with respect to the social, political, and economic aspects of life. Islam does not allow in the least the modern secular approach in which religion is confined to one's private life and modes of worship. On no pretext whatsoever — economic stringency, difficulties in interest-free monetary transactions, extravagant customary practices on weddings and other social occasions — can a true and committed Muslim justify himself in indulging in un-Islamic behavior. This is the basic and foremost lesson that comes out so clearly and emphatically from this *ayah* of Surah Aal-e-Imran for anyone who aspires to live as a Muslim and die as a Muslim.

And hold fast, all together, to the Rope of Allah (which He stretched out for you), and be not divided among yourselves; and remember with gratitude Allah's favor on you, for you were once enemies and then He joined your hearts in love, so that by His Grace you became brethren; and you were on the brink of the pit of fire, and He saved you from it. Thus does Allah make His Signs clear to you, that you may be guided to the right way.

The next *ayah* (*ayah* 103) of Surah Aal-e-Imran

explains the second practical step that the Muslim *Ummah* is urged to undertake. All those who have accomplished to the maximum possible degree the requirement of the preceding *ayah* and attained the driving force of *Taqwa* (i.e., God-consciousness) in their lives — are called upon to unite and join together for the cause of Islam. Until and unless they join hands together and become like a solid steel-ribbed structure, they cannot achieve the supremacy and ascendancy of Islam at the global level. It is a well-established truth that any influential and wide-ranging mission, be it a moral or an immoral one, requires the concerted efforts of a group of people.

The noblest and loftiest end — to make humanity surrender to one God — that Prophet Muhammad (SAW) achieved in his life time was only achieved with the selfless, dedicated, and cooperative efforts of his Companions (RAA). But the Prophet (SAW) himself could achieve this within the boundaries of Arabian Peninsula and the task of disseminating Islam and making it dominant in the entire world was put on the shoulders of Muslim *Ummah*. This gigantic duty obviously calls for a united and organized struggle.

Now, just as a strong and solid wall requires strong blocks or bricks, the individual members of the Islamic *Jihad* movement should also be men of deep inner conviction and noblest character, who strive together to bring all power and all powers under God. If the individual Muslim suffers from lack of commitment to the Islamic cause and is not a dedicated worker, the Islamic *Ummah* cannot

accomplish its Divinely ordained mission. In other words, each Muslim must first himself become a sincere, wholehearted, and authentic believer in order to play his role in the discharge of *Ummatic* obligations. The consolidation and invigoration of *Iman* or *Taqwa* in the individual person is the subject which has been dealt with most fully yet succinctly in the preceding *ayah* of the Holy Qur'an. Now, we move on to the second step.

We have seen that it is of utmost urgency for Muslims to join hands together for the realization of *Ummah's* destiny as the standard-bearer of truth, the establishment of Divine Order of social justice and equity on earth; in other words, bringing God's earth under God's rule. The most important question that arises here is: What is that bond or cementing material which would bind the Muslims into a strongly united group or collectivity? The Qur'anic *ayah* under discussion provides answer to this very question: "And hold fast, all together, the cord of Allah (that he stretched out for you), and be not divided among yourselves...."

The simile used here is that of people struggling in deep water, to whom a benevolent Providence stretches out a strong and unbreakable cord or rope of rescue. If all hold fast to it together, their mutual support adds to the chance of their safety. One may wonder here as to what *habl Allah* — the cord of Allah (SWT) — really means. Mention of a few methodological points with regard to the commentary on, and understanding of, the Holy Qur'an will be in the fitness of things!

The first principle to be kept in mind in the interpretation and understanding of the Qur'an is that its one *ayah* or portion is sometimes explained and elaborated by another *ayah* or portion of the Qur'an. In case one does not find such explanation within the Qur'an, then the second recognized principle is to explore the backgrounds of the Qur'anic revelations called the "occasions of revelation." They were recorded by the Companions of the Prophet (SAW) as a necessary aid for fixing the correct meaning of the Word of God. And linked with this is the belief with regard to Prophet Muhammad (SAW) vis-à-vis the Qur'an, for he clarified and elaborated the Qur'an, supplementing its broad general principles by giving them precise and detailed forms, and incorporating them into practical life, his own as well as those of his followers. Thus the Qur'an affirms this role of the Prophet in these words:

> And we sent down the Book to you for the express purpose that you should make clear to them those things in which they differ, and that it should be a guide and a mercy to those who believe. (An-Nahl 16:64)

In the light of these principles, for an understanding of the expression "cord of Allah," we should turn to the traditions of the Holy Prophet (SAW). In the presence of authentic historical traditions of the Prophet (SAW) about a particular issue or point, it is wrong to resort to free-play of reason or fancy. Indeed such interpretation of arbitrary opinion (*tafseer bil-ra'ay*) has never found favor with orthodox Muslims. Many Urdu translators and exegesists of the Qur'an have not bothered to

study the more than one available authentic (i.e., sound in terms of chain of transmission) statements of the Prophet (SAW) himself which elucidate the expression. For one renowned scholar, the expression generally refers to the "religion of God." I see no reason why one should deal with it so cavalierly and ignore a genuine, trustworthy and *marfu' hadith* (in which the saying of the Prophet itself is reported). As a matter of principle, knowledge of Arabic language, grammar, lexicography, Arabic literature, and familiarity with Arabic idiom of the times of the Prophet (SAW) are all important as instruments for writing commentary on Qur'an. But recourse to semantic and linguistic analysis or personal opinion should not in any way overrule the primary importance of the Prophet's sayings and explications. Following this paramount principle of Qur'anic exegesis, I shall mention here very briefly three *ahadith* of the Prophet (SAW) which explicate without an iota of doubt the real import and meaning of *habl Allah.*

1. A rather lengthy historical tradition on the Qur'an has been narrated by the fourth Caliph Ali (RAA), in which the Prophet (SAW) is reported to have said about the Qur'an: "It is this very Qur'an that is the cord of Allah." (Tirmidhi & Darimi)

2. In another *hadith,* reported on the authority of Abdullah Ibn Mas'ud (RAA), the Prophet (SAW) said: "This Qur'an is the cord of Allah which He has stretched from the heavens to the earth."

3 The third *hadith* has been reported by Jubair Ibn Mut'im (RAA) and included in Tibrani Kabir. This

hadith so vividly gives the details of an episode in the lifetime of the Prophet (SAW) that the reader begins to feel for a few moments as if he himself is sitting in the company of the Prophet. Once the Holy Prophet (SAW) came out of his *hujrah* and saw a few of the Companions (RAA) studying and discussing the Qur'an in a corner of the mosque. The Prophet (SAW), very much pleased with this, approached them and asked them a strange question. This question we should also put to ourselves and see if we can sincerely give the same affirmative answer that was given by the Companions. The Prophet (SAW) asked them, "Do you not attest to the truths that there is no god but Allah who alone should be worshipped, that He is one and without partner, that I am His Messenger, and that this Qur'an has come from Him?" All the Companions firmly replied in the affirmative. (May Allah enable us also to attest sincerely and with heart-felt certitude the fundamental metaphysical beliefs of Islam. Although we all verbally attest these beliefs, what is required is inner conviction and faith of the heart). On this the Prophet (SAW) said, "Rejoice at what you have got with yourselves because one end of the Qur'an is in Allah's hand and the other end is with you. So hold it fast. If you do that, you will never perish or go astray."

Despite these three authentic traditions of the Prophet (SAW), if someone maintains that *habl Allah* means something other than the Qur'an, his opinion cannot be taken seriously. Indeed he has no justification whatsoever for that. Allama Iqbal has expressed this very truth in the following Persian

couplets thus:

از یک آئینی مسلماں زندہ است
پیکر ملت ز قرآں زندہ است
ما ہمہ خاک و دل آگاہ اوست
اعتصامش کن کہ حبل اللہ اوست

That is to say, the collective life and *Ummatic* existence of the Muslims is due to the Qur'an that provides them with a common legal framework and code of life. The multitudes of Muslims have no significance; all significance rests with the Qur'an that functions like a throbbing heart in the socio political body of the Muslims. Iqbal, therefore, advises the Muslims to hold fast to the Qur'an as it is the cord of Allah (SWT).

The second imperative that is laid down by *ayah* 103 is, therefore, that all Muslims are commanded by Allah (SWT) to hold fast to the Divine cord, the Qur'an. The Arabic verb *i'tesam* used in this *ayah* is also very significant. The root of the verb – *ismat* – means security and protection; and the meaning of the verb *i'tesam* is to hold fast to something or somebody for security and safety in the face of danger or threat. Its real sense comes out clearly when we see a child who, in all his innocence, clings to his mother, thinking that she can protect him from all sorts of dangers and odds. Clinging or holding fast to somebody for security is *i'tesam*. So Almighty Allah (SWT) enjoins upon the Muslims to hold fast to the Divine cord – the Holy Qur'an.

The Arabic expression *Jamee'an* used in the *ayah*

can be interpreted in two ways, and I think both meanings are to be taken here. First, it may mean that all Muslims should jointly hold fast and cling to the Qur'an. Secondly, it may also signify that the whole, and not a few parts, of the Qur'an is to be taken as guide for life. If only some fragmentary injunctions of the Divine writ are put into practice and others are simply ignored, this will be like the attitude of the Israelites who were reproached very strongly by Allah (SWT) in these words:

> Do you believe in a part of the Scripture and reject the other? What else, then, could be the retribution of those among you who do this than they should live in degradation in the present life, and that on the Day of Resurrection they should be sent to the severest chastisement? (Al-Baqarah 2 : 85)

Belief in the Qur'an remains imperfect until the code of life it lays down is accepted in its entirety. It is ironic to see that the majority of Westernized and secularized Muslims take a partial view of Islamic life and do not at all see the need to extend, strengthen, and complete its Qur'anic foundations, with the result that the door to the highest stages of *Taqwa* and *Ihsan* are supposed to be open for a judge of court who may give judgments in violation of the Qur'an, for a lawyer who may argue on the basis of laws contrary to the *Shari'ah,* for the administrator who may manage the affairs of life in accordance with a system based on *kufr,* for the political leader and his followers who may work for founding and building of life on the social and political principles of the disbelievers — in short, for everyone, provided he fashions his

outward style of life after a certain pattern and observes a few rituals and ceremonies of worship.

The reason for the use of the word *habl* (cord) is that the Qur'an both establishes a bond between man and God and joins all believers together in the religious fraternity. To take a firm hold on this cord means that the believers should attach utmost importance to their religion: this should always be the center of their concerns; they should continually strive to establish it; and the common desire to serve it should make them cooperate with each other. As soon as Muslims turn their attention away from the fundamental teachings of their faith and lose sight of establishing its ascendancy in life they begin to concern themselves with matters of secondary importance. And, just as they rent the communities of the former prophets, enticing people away from their true objective in life, so schism and dissension are bound to plague their lives. If Muslims do this they are bound to suffer indignity and disgrace both in this world and the Next as happened with the followers of the previous prophets. So a true Muslim is only one whose whole being is permeated with Islam; it is not a mere veneer or outward show.

After this, an historical evidence from the period in which the Qur'an was being revealed was presented and the believers were addressed thus : "And remember with gratitude Allah's favor on you, for you were enemies and He joined your hearts in love, so that by His grace you became brethren."

Yathrib, and indeed the whole of Arabia, was torn with civil and tribal feuds and contentions before

the Prophet of Islam set his sacred feet on its soil. After that, it became the city of the Prophet (SAW), an unmatched brotherhood, and the pivot of Islam. Before the advent of Islam, there were animosities among the tribes which regularly broke out into fighting and devastation; every now and then there was much bloodshed. Things had reached a point where the entire Arabian nation seemed to be on the verge of destroying itself. It was due to the blessings of Islam alone that it was saved from being consumed by the fire to which this *ayah* alludes. The people of Yathrib (which later came to be known as Medinah) had embraced Islam some three or four years before this *ayah* was revealed. They had witnessed the blessing of Islam as it unified into one brotherhood the Aws and the Khazraj, two tribes which had long been sworn enemies. Moreover, both tribes treated the migrants from Makkah in a spirit of sacrifice and love seldom seen even among members of the same family. The *ayah* under consideration ends with the words: "Thus Allah makes His signs clear to you that you may be guided to the right way." That is to say, if people had eyes to see they could conclude for themselves whether their salvation lay in adhering firmly to the teachings of the Qur'an or in abandoning them and reverting to their former state. They could decide very easily whether their true well-wishers were Allah (SWT) and His Messenger (SAW) or those Jews, Polytheists, and hypocrites who strove to plunge them back into their former despicable state.

Before we proceed further, it is quite appropriate to see if the historical evidence alluded to in this *ayah* has any special bearing on the current political

scenario of Pakistan. As Muslims, we believe that the teachings of the Qur'an have eternal and everlasting validity and that, as a source of guidance, the Qur'anic principles have applicability for all places and for all times to come. Seen in this perspective, we can better appreciate the gravity of the conditions prevailing today in Pakistan, and, at the same time, see a ray of hope offered to all believers in the Qur'anic *ayah* under discussion. Just as Allah (SWT) welded the warring Arab factions into a strong brotherhood fourteen centuries ago He can now turn the disarrayed and conflicting provinces of Pakistan into a strong unity, provided the people of Pakistan earnestly act upon the three-point action strategy explained in these three *ayaat*.

It is an undeniable historical fact that the Indian subcontinent was partitioned on the basis of Two-Nation theory, and that Pakistan was established on the foundation of Muslim Nationhood and in the name of Islam. Muslims living in the widely separated areas of India were united by the bond of Islamic faith, and demanded a separate homeland with the objective that Muslims of India, by removing all the taints of decadent and monarchical Islam, get an opportunity to re-establish the pristine Islamic system of political, economic, and social justice which is the most important manifestation of the Holy Prophet's (SAW) universal mercy and blessing. We regret to say, however, that in spite of the fact that forty seven years have passed since Pakistan was established, no real progress has as yet been made towards achieving the envisaged goal. The political and economic system inherited from the British Raj

has throughout been kept intact; not only in the overall system, but in matters of social and communal values also we are strictly maintaining the status quo. Both in practice and thought we exhibit the same old slavish mentality.

The system to which we are sticking in the political governance of our homeland has the following important features:

1. Territorial Nationalism, i.e., the concept of nationalism that was born of Western secularism and on whose absolute negation Pakistan movement was launched.

2. Parliamentary Democracy, the initial training of which was imparted to us by our English rulers.

3. The names and boundaries of the provinces demarcated by the British for their administrative expediency and which we consider not only permanent and everlasting but even sacrosanct.

4. The banking system — on which all our industry and trade, in fact our entire economy, is based — is contaminated to this day by the filth of interest. As a result, the entire nation and the country is, in the words of the Qur'an, at war with Allah (SWT) and His Messenger (SAW).

5. Accursed evils of gambling, speculation and lottery —declared by the Qur'an as "an abomination of Satan's handiwork" (Al-Mai'da 5:90) — are rampant.

6. The system of feudalism and absentee landlordism, the worst and most abominable form of oppression and usurpation, has basically not changed at all in spite of the so-called land reforms introduced

twice.

7. Mixed (non-segregated) social living that debased the West as far as modesty and chastity are concerned. It destroyed the domestic peace and confounded the family structure. And this evil is such that it did not take roots in our society even during the British rule to the extent it is now in vogue, and is increasing by leaps and bounds every day.

8. The distinction between the "tribal" and "settled" areas in the N.W.F.P. is still continuing.

The current scenario of Pakistan calls for a total change in the entire body politic and socio-economic system of the homeland. Unity among the people of Pakistan and the establishment of Islamic Social Justice is the need of the day. This, in fact, was the real purpose of establishing Pakistan, and only this can ensure her continued existence, stability and progress. It is on account of deviation from this very cause that the Muslim nation of Pakistan got divided into different regional, ethnic and linguistic nationalities. This breaking of our vow with Allah (SWT) and disloyalty to His *Deen* has led to tremendous plunder and bloodshed among the people of various regions. Divine punishment whipped us in 1971 and even now if we do not make headway towards the real objective of Pakistan, Divine punishment could whip us again any time and would whip us more severely. Indeed, Pakistan has to prepare herself to face all the threats posed by the New World Order. If, on the contrary, Pakistanis do not come out of their deep slumber and do not give up their materialistic pursuits, the anti-Islamic designs of the so-called "supreme world power" will

subjugate it to the point of virtual nonexistence. An ostrich-like attitude will not save us from perilous dangers, and it is imperative that we, at the earliest and in right earnest, read the writing on the wall.

If a true Muslim reflects on the conditions of Pakistan diligently and thoughtfully, he will realize that the situation of Pakistanis totally resembles that of the Arabs before the advent of Islam depicted in the words of the Qur'an — "you stood on the brink of a pit of fire." And the only way out of this pit of fire is the one delineated by these *ayaat* of Surah Aal-e-Imran. As the Qur'an is the eternal Divine message for all humanity, its teachings too have abiding efficacy and applicability. No matter how degenerate our conditions and circumstances may be, the Qur'an offers a sure panacea for all our ills.

In the *Khatm Al-Qur'an* prayer we most humbly pray to Almighty Allah (SWT) that Qur'an may be made our leader, guide and beacon of light. But, surely, we cannot get it all merely for the asking. We have to struggle hard to achieve our solicited desires. Holding fast together to the cord of Allah — the Holy Qur'an — is, therefore, the second practical point of the strategy laid down by the Divine Book.

To summarize the action-agenda so far covered in these pages: the first practical step of the three-point Qur'anic strategy is with regard to *Taqwa* and *Islam*. That is to say, a true Muslim should remain steadfast in his obedience and loyalty to God. He should avoid everything which is not pleasing to Him and live his entire life in total submission to His commandments. As a corollary, acting on the injunctions of the Holy Prophet (SAW) is also included in it, as the

commandments of the Prophet (SAW) are in fact the commandments of Allah (see Al-Nisa 4:80). The second practical step is with regard to the Qur'an: *i'tesam bil-Qur'an* – holding fast and attaching oneself firmly to the Qur'an. And this obligation is to be discharged in a unified manner. Division and dissension among Muslims is thoroughly disapproved by Allah (SWT).

Now the question is : What does "holding fast together the cord of Allah" mean and imply in practical terms. In the booklet *The Obligations Muslims Owe To the Qur'an,* I have made an impassioned call to the Muslims to return to the Qur'an, to rededicate themselves to its study, and make it the sole guide for their lives. Instead of making purely academic attempts at describing the unique merits and magnificence of Qur'an, the most pertinent thing for us to do is that we should clearly understand our responsibilities towards the Qur'an and then assess for ourselves whether or not we are conscientiously fulfilling them. Paying lip service or pompous tributes to the Qur'an will not be enough and these cannot substitute for actually discharging our obligations towards the Holy Book. Now what are these obligations? Or, in other words, what does the Qur'an demand from us? An objective study of the Book makes it amply clear that it makes five demands from every Muslim. Put in a simple language, these demands or obligations are as follows:

1. A Muslim is required to truly believe in the Qur'an.
2. He is required to read it properly.
3. He is required to understand it.

4. He is required to act upon its teachings in his private life to struggle for the implementation of *Shari'ah* and the establishment of Social Justice at the state level.
5. He is required to disseminate its teachings to others and operationalize Islam at the global level. He must spend most of his energies and monetary sources for this cause.

As a matter of fact, if Muslims rejuvenate their relationship with the Qur'an on these lines, it will weld them into one *Ummah* with utmost mental and emotional unity as well as unique singularity of purpose and objective. All sorts of dissension, strife and antagonism among them will automatically vanish, and they will become united like a solid cemented structure (in Qur'anic expression, *bunyan marsus*). And . this will indeed be a concrete exemplification of the Holy Prophet's saying according to which Almighty Allah (SWT) will bestow dignity and honor on those people who hold fast to the Qur'an and will degrade and disgrace those who turn a deaf ear to it and do not discharge their obligations towards it. Allama Iqbal has expressed these very ideas in beautiful Persian verses thus:

خوار از مہجوری قرآں شدی
شکوہ سنج گردشِ دوراں شدی
اے چوں شبنم بر زمیں افتندۀ
در بغل داری کتابِ زندۀ

To sum up: there are the two practical steps

through which a man personally becomes a true believer and the collectivity of believers takes the form of a strong ideological fraternity. Now the question that crops up is: what methodology is to be pursued by this ideological group for its global struggle? This indeed is the subject matter of the next Qur'anic *ayah* to be explained in the sequel. It is a happy coincidence that this methodology too consists of three points and we will dwell upon them at some length.

Let us now concentrate our attention on the third *ayah* (*ayah* 104 of Surah Aal-e-Imran) the English translation of which reads:

And from among you there must be a party (a group or band of committed Muslims) who invite people to all that is good, and enjoin the doing of all that is right and forbid the doing of all that is wrong. It is they who will attain true success.

An objective and detailed study of the preceding two *ayaat* of the Surah leaves no ambiguity or doubt in the mind of the reader that both of them call for a collectivity of believers, and that a serious and sincere action on their dictates necessarily demands the formation of a group or party. Now the question arises: what is the objective or goal this group should keep in view and work for? As a matter of fact, all creations and artifacts are made for serving some purpose. Even a small and modest association of people is constituted and organized for achieving certain goals defined in the memorandum of aims and objectives. So the question that quite naturally arises is: what is the purpose or goal of that group

which results from collectively clinging to the Qur'an? This exactly is what is explained in the *ayah* under review.

This *ayah* has been translated in two different ways by the translators. For some, the preposition *min* of *minkum* in the *ayah* is general and descriptive, while for some others it is of particularizing nature. Leaving aside the technicalities of the two types of *min* just mentioned, let us see what difference, if any, is made in the meaning of the *ayah* by either use of it. According to the former the *ayah* would be translated as: "And you should together form a group that invites people to all that is good...," whereas according to the latter sense of *min* the translation would be: "And from among you there must be a group or party that invites people to all that is good ...." Now in my view both these translations of the *ayah* are entirely correct, and the logical import of the meaning of the *ayah* is hardly changed by the minor linguistic difference of the two translations. If all the Muslims of the world unite and together constitute an ideological fraternity (i.e., the Muslim *Ummah*) that performs the duties of inviting people to all that is good, enjoin the doing of all right actions and forbid the doing of all that is wrong – this would be the import of the *ayah* according to the descriptive or indicative use of *min*. But since this descriptive function of the whole of Muslim *Ummah* is repeated a little further on in *ayah* 110 of this very Surah, a large majority of Qur'anic scholars take *min* in the particularizing sense and interpret the *ayah* by maintaining that it demands the formation of a group comprising of committed and motivated Muslims

from among the vast Muslim fraternity of less motivated believers. That is to say, this *ayah* provides answer to the question: what should be done when, by and large, the *Ummah* neglects its religious obligations and thus pays no heed to its Divinely ordained duties.

Let us frankly acknowledge the hard facts and conditions of present-day Muslims, however unpleasant they may appear to us. Theoretically, the words "Muslim *Ummah*" cover in their fold all the Muslims of the world and as such it is a universalistic concept. But, as a matter of fact, one global Muslim *Ummah* is at the moment a non-entity. Instead, there are many Muslim nations in the world. Even Allama Muhammad Iqbal, a great advocate of the unity of Muslim *Ummah*, had to be realistic about the actual condition of Muslims in the world. Accordingly, in his lectures, entitled *Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam*, he wrote that there is no one united Muslim *Ummah* in the world; rather there are many Muslim nations living in different states. However, perhaps this too was true more than half a century ago when Allama Iqbal delivered the Lectures. The present situation of most Muslim nations is worse still and most Muslim nations are split into numerous regional, ethnic, or linguistic groups.

The readers of these lines can very well appreciate this fact if they consider the case of Pakistan. At the time of its appearance in 1947 as a separate homeland for the Muslims of the Indian subcontinent, Pakistanis were considered as one Muslim nation by all. Both wings of Pakistan were

united and considered Islam the basis of their unity. Soon afterwards, however, regional sentiments and concern for regional languages came up on the surface and eventually paved the way for the ceding of East Pakistan. Consequently, it became Bangladesh in 1971 and asserted her Bengali identity more than the former Muslim character. Every one of us laments how savagely and brutally non-Bengali Muslims were tortured and murdered by the Bengali nationalists of East Pakistan. And in the truncated Pakistan, too, there is no ideological unity in the people. The Pakistani nation stands divided and fragmented on the bases of ethnicity, culture, and language, and different groups are constantly at loggers head with each other. Since not a single province of Pakistan has only one ethnic community, we often hear news of gruesome violence and brutalities among various communities living in one province and even in one city. For example, in Baluchistan there are at least three large ethnic groups, and to a lesser degree this is also true of other provinces of Pakistan. In Sindh the Mohajirs (migrants from India) have formally assumed the status of a politico-cultural entity. Indeed, from the very beginning, distinction was made almost every where in the country but particularly in the province of Sindh between the locals and the migrants, and this discrimination eventually led to the formation of MQM in urban Sindh. Again the Arab world, where all speak and write Arabic, is divided in a number of nation-states and people there identify themselves with reference to distinct nationalities.

So the hard fact that we must accept is that today

a united world Muslim *Ummah* is non-existent. The de facto position is frankly none other than this. The *Ummah* only exists as an ideal concept in the minds of Muslims who consider theoretically all believers of Islam and the Prophet (SAW) as members of one global religious fraternity. According to this belief, each confessor of Muhammad's (SAW) Prophethood is regarded a member of the universal Muslim brotherhood. This belief in itself is perfectly correct, but the question is whether Muslims all around the world do in fact behave as a well-knit ideological group? Is there any discipline among the Muslims? Is there a plenary leadership among Muslim nations and are the directives and recommendations of that leadership heeded by the member states? I regret to say that the answer to all these questions is in the negative. Was not a large part of Afghan army with the Russians when the latter were killing Afghan people mercilessly? Were not the most inhuman atrocities against Afghans committed by their own Islam-professing Afghan brethren? Again was not the long and devastating war between Iran and Iraq between two Muslim countries? Armed clashes between different factions of Muslims in Lebanon and brutal and murderous assaults on Palestinian refugee camps are known to anyone who is in touch with modern media. And the recent Gulf war has proved beyond any doubt that, as a matter of fact, one world-wide Muslim *Ummah* does not exist.

In the light of these facts the *ayah* under consideration with the particularizing sense of preposition in the expression *minkum* assumes special significance and its meanings become quite

intelligible. In effect, what it means is that even when the vast multitudes of people in the Muslim *Ummah* are in a state of slumber, are divided among themselves and pursuing only secular ends, there must arise a group or party within the larger *Ummah* that performs the duties laid down by the Qur'an in this *ayah,* and also make the rest aware of them.

Some readers may wonder as to what an *Ummah* within the *Ummah* means. I am sure you must be familiar with the expressions of "a state within a state" and "a party within a party." For instance, those among you who have read about the freedom struggle of the Indian subcontinent know very well that the Indian National Congress was a big political party and there was a forward block of it within the Congress that consisted of rather more revolutionary members. The forward block stood for more radical strategy as compared with the ordinary political policies approved by the Congress. Despite their membership and loyalty to the Indian Congress, they constituted a separate group under the leadership of Subhash Chandra Bose.

Similarly, since in the contemporary context the universal Muslim *Ummah* has been reduced to the level of an abstract concept, its reification is needed in the form of a smaller group (from among the larger *Ummah*) consisting of such Muslims as have fulfilled, to the maximum possible degree, the requirements and demands made in *ayah* 102 of the Surah with respect to the individual behavior and practice of a true Muslim. They attain the driving force of *Taqwa* in their hearts and meticulously observe the

commandments of the Holy Prophet (SAW). Moreover, in compliance, to a fair degree, with the imperatives of the next *ayah,* they hold fast to the Qur'an for guidance even in minor details of their lives, and unite and join together as comrades in order to make up an ideological group. *Ayah* 104 of Surah Aal-e-Imran enlightens us about the three aims and objectives this collectivity of God-conscious and motivated Muslims is to work for:

1. Calling and inviting people to all that is good and noble.
2. Enjoining and dictating the doing of all that is right and virtuous.
3. Forbidding the doing of all that is wrong and immoral.

First of all, let us discuss the first two objectives and goals of the real and hard-core Muslim *Ummah*'s struggle. The Islamic summons have, by and large, been understood by Muslims to be in general call to *Iman* and *A'mal Saleh* (righteous action) in conformity with the guidance of Revelation, summoning people to God and inviting them to follow His and His Messenger's dictates. But the crucial question that must be asked here is: Do the Qur'anic injunctions "calling and inviting people to all that is good" and "enjoining the doing of all that is right" mean one and the same action? We, however, cannot think for a minute that Almighty Allah (SWT) has used synonymous expressions in the same *ayah* for pointless repetition. They certainly mean and imply different performances or levels and intensity of operations. *da'wah ilal-khair* and *amr bil-ma'roof* are

obviously semantically distinct expressions and thus connote different types of activities. Most probably, *da'wah ilal-khair* means calling and inviting people to the Qur'an, as according to the Holy Qur'an the highest *khair* (i.e., good) is the Qur'an itself. To substantiate this the following *ayaat* of Surah Yunus can be cited:

> O mankind! There has come unto you an Admonition (or an Exhortation) from your Lord, and a Healing for the diseases in your hearts, and for those who believe a Guidance and a Mercy. Say: In this bounty of Allah and in His Mercy, therein let them rejoice; it is better than all (the worldly wealth) that they may amass! (Yunus 10: 57, 58)

These two *ayaat* clearly tell us how majestically Qur'an describes its own magnificence. Those who do wrong have a disease in their hearts, which causes their spirits to suffocate. Allah (SWT) in His Mercy declares His Will (i.e., the Qur'an) to them which should direct their lives and provide a healing for their spiritual malaise. If they accept faith, the remedy acts; they find themselves in right guidance and receive Allah's forgiveness and mercy. Surely this guidance — the Qur'an — is far better a gift than material gains, wealth, or possessions. Therefore, according to this *ayah*, the referent of *khair* is Qur'an itself, something far superior to what worldly people hoard. To be sure, worldly possessions and wealth have also been termed as *khair* by the Qur'an. For example, an *ayah* of Surah Al-Aadiyaat reads:

> ... for, verily, to the love of wealth (*khair*) is he most ardently devoted. (Al-Aadiyaat 100:8)

This, of course, refers to a natural inclination and disposition of man. Yet, we are told in very clear and categorical terms that the Divine gift bestowed upon us in the form of the Qur'an is in reality far better than material riches and belongings. So *da'wah ilal-khair* (that is to say, inviting and calling people to goodness) is, in fact, exhorting men to study and act upon the teachings of the Qur'an.

While the first objective or aim of the *Ummah's* missionary work is specifically with respect to the Qur'an, the second one is quite general and broad. It includes advising, admonishing, preaching, and exhorting people to all that is morally right and virtuous. However, the literal meaning of the Arabic verb *amr* is definitely more, and stronger, than just advising or preaching sermons; it additionally implies commanding and implementing with force. Thus *amr* is quite a wide expression. Starting from moralizing it goes right up to the bringing about of a revolution in political leadership so that corrupt and ungodly people are forced to be righteous and follow Divine guidance.

Another difference between *da'wah* and *amr* is that the former (i.e., preaching and exhorting) is never undertaken in an authoritative manner. On the contrary, it is always performed in a warm and heart-moving manner. In *da'wah* one pleads and even requests people most humbly to uphold goodness and probity. The *da'ee* (i.e., one who performs the *da'wah*) is always on the look out for an appropriate moment when he can approach people in a receptive mood. He even requests them in the name of God to

order their lives according to the dictates of Islam. His role is both of an evangelist (i.e., one who gives glad tidings on moral actions) and of a warner of the torments of hell-fire. He is always very polite and never harsh, aggressive, or authoritative. This indeed is the attitude which members of the *Tableeghi Jama'at* have adopted for the past several decades for their missionary activities.

In *da'wah,* one speaks from the depth of ones heart and strikes a cord in the interlocutor's heart as the preacher is definitely taken as a well-wisher. This difference amply shows why calling people to goodness has been mentioned by the Qur'an as distinct and separate from "enjoining what is morally right." The mild and polite manner to be adopted in *da'wah* was required of Prophet Musa (AS) and Prophet Haroon (AS) when the two messengers were ordered by Allah (SWT) to go to the Pharaoh. We read in Surah Taha the following *ayaat*:

> Go forth (then), you and your brother, with My messages, and never tire of remembering Me. Go forth, both of you, unto Pharaoh, for verily he has transgressed all bounds of equity! But speak unto him in a mild manner, so that he might bethink himself or (at least) be filled with apprehension (Taha 42:44).

Thus *amr bil-ma'roof* is a step higher than mere *da'wah ilal-khair* or preaching and, as such, it calls for a different methodology and approach. The word *amr* literally means to order, dictate, or enforce on the basis of authority. This necessitates, at the societal or state level, a change or revolutions in the whole power structure so that the morally good and right is

implemented and enforced with the authority of governmental institutions. Supporting evidence for this is also provided by the fact that the expression *amr bil-ma'roof* was first used in Surah Al-Hajj when the Prophet (SAW) and his Companions (RAA) were obliquely given the glad tiding of political power. English translation of *ayah* 41 of this Surah reads:

> (They are) those who, if we establish them in the land, organize regular prayer and give regular charity, enjoin the right and forbid wrong...(Al-Hajj 22:41).

Soon after the revelation of this Surah, the foundations of an Islamic state were laid in Medinah, and the Prophet (SAW) began to enforce the laws of *Shari'ah* and religious practices in the capacity of a political ruler. However, it may be noted that full and total authority in the Arabian peninsula was achieved only after the conquest of Makkah, some ten years latter.

A very important point must be clearly appreciated and understood by all of us at this juncture. Absence of Islamic political power at the state level does not imply that the Qur'anic injunction of *amr bil-ma'roof* has no scope or relevance for Muslims. Each individual Muslim who wields power over some persons in his home, factory, office, or business establishment, is under obligation to act upon this injunction. He or she must enforce religious and moral commandments upon his or her subordinates and dependents. If need be, even force or moderate punishment may be resorted to in this regard. No true Muslim can absolve himself of this

obligation of *amr bil-ma'roof* (of course, within the sphere of his/her authority) on the pretext that this duty can be discharged only by the Muslim political leadership of the State. Complete and total observance of Islamic law and morality, no doubt, is possible only when a change or revolution in favor of the Qur'an and the Prophet's (SAW) *Sunnah* is brought about by the Islamic revivalist movement in the country's leadership. This all-important point was very clearly realized and forcefully presented by late Maulana Sayyid Abul A'la Maududi – one of the chief influential writers and leaders of the contemporary Islamic resurgence. I shall here quote a long relevant passage from his *Tehreek-e-Islami ki Akhlaqi Bunyadain* rendered into English by Khurram Murad. These lines will put into bold relief the difference between *da'wah* and *amr bil-ma'roof*:

> The objective of the Islamic movement, in this world, is revolution in leadership. A leadership that has rebelled against God and His guidance and is responsible for the suffering of mankind has to be replaced by a leadership that is God-conscious, righteous and committed to following Divine guidance. Striving to achieve this noble purpose, we believe, will secure God's favor in this world and in the next. It is regrettable that both Muslims and non-Muslims have tended to lose sight of the significance of this revolution. Muslims all too often consider it necessary only from the point of view of political expediency, and have no appreciation of its central place in their religion. Non-Muslims, partly from prejudice and partly from lack of information, do not understand that ungodly leadership is at the

1. In this *hadith* there is no mention of *amr bil-ma'roof* or enjoining the good. This means that *nahee anil-munkar,* i.e., changing or stopping the evil, is an independent and equally significant activity in the value-structure and obligations of our faith. A religiously wrong or evil action is in fact a transgression of the limits laid down by the Creator, and, as such, a true and faithful believer cannot remain passive or unconcerned on the violation of Divine commandments.

2. Changing or stopping evil with one's hand obviously means that all available power and authority should be used in curbing wrong action and routing out evil from the society. If there is an Islamic government in the county, it is its duty and responsibility to use all its force to eliminate un-Islamic practices. But in case the government remains complacent in this regard, it is the duty of all true Muslims to force people to shun evil and loathsome actions within the sphere in which they can exercise authority. For example, a father or an employer should use a reasonable amount of force in correcting such subordinates who indulge in immoral and forbidden activities.

3. If neither the State authorities discharge their duties with regard to *nahee anil-munkar* nor an individual Muslim can muster the power to check all that is wrong, he must, as the second best alternative, verbally denounce it and ask or request the person concerned to give it up. In the present age this will also include writing and publishing in the print media articles condemning un-Islamic patterns of

behavior so that public opinion is mobilized against the evil. Indeed, "changing or stopping the evil with tongue" involves all the variegated moves of protest and agitation permissible in a democratic set-up. Both individuals in their private capacity and Islamic groups collectively should use all their resources of speech and printed word for increasing people's awareness and sensibility against satanic tendencies of thought and action. They should do this boldly, remaining undaunted by the criticism and harassment of the general public or government.

4. In case social and political conditions in a place are so repressive that a truly committed Muslim cannot even use his tongue or pen in denouncing the evil, then he should at least feel pain inwardly. He should feel disgusted and condemn evil with his heart. Far from showing apathy, he must feel disturbed and perturbed. This will itself be a pointer to the fact that the person has *Iman* or faith, even though minimal and of the lowest degree. The word *ad'af* used in the *hadith* is of the superlative degree and as such signifies the "weakest" or the "faintest." In another Prophetic saying instead of the expression "that is the lowest *Iman*," the following description has been used: "and after this, *Iman* is not present even in as meager a quantity as a small grain." That is to say, if one of the attitudes out of the above three is not adopted by a Muslim, it would mean that true faith and *Iman* is almost nonexistent in the core of his heart.

5. The three attitudes mentioned and the corresponding states of *Iman* are not to be measured and judged by any external observer. No objective

formula can be used in determining the faith-state of a person. Each individual Muslim can be a judge in his or her own case and choose the best and the highest possible course of *nahee anil-munkar.* It all depends on the intensity and depth of one's *Iman* and the degree of one's commitment to the cause of Islam. Each individual Muslim himself can measure these for himself. Nobody else can do it for him or make a wholly correct judgment upon his assessment. Nevertheless, the inward state of one's *Iman* is reflected by the external attitude and behavior. For example if a person keeps silent or remains passive when his father or mother is publicly disgraced, this attitude of his is a sure indication of his unconcern or apathy towards his parents. Or else it shows that he lacks courage or even that he is impudent or disrespectful. If a person is not shameless but somehow lacks the means to physically counteract or defend, at least his face will become red with rage, exhibiting utter disgust and displeasure.

The example given in the preceding paragraph also sheds light in a parallel way on the degree and depth of a Muslim's commitment to Islam and *Iman.* If he is not in a position to check and physically stop anti-Islamic actions, he protests against them using all the means at his command. He is even ready to face the atrocities of State agencies like baton-charging and firing. Indeed, his greatest desire is to lay down his life for the cause of Islam. The last part of the *hadith* under consideration – "and that is the weakest *Iman*" – implicitly demands that Muslims as a collectivity should try their utmost to acquire strength and power so as to completely eradicate evil from the

society.

Now let us study closely the text of the second *hadith*:

> Abdullah Ibn Mas'ud (RAA) says that Allah's Messenger (SAW) said: There was never a prophet sent before me by Allah (SWT) to his nation who had not among his people (his) disciples and companions, who followed his ways and obeyed his commands. Then there came after them their successors who said what they did not practise and did what they were not commanded to do. He who struggles against them with his hand (i.e., physically), he is the believer; and he who struggles against them with his tongue, he is the believer; and he who struggles against them with his heart, he is also the believer: but beyond that there is not even a grain of *Iman*.

In this long *hadith* the Holy Prophet (SAW) starts by mentioning the fact that whenever Allah (SWT) sent a messenger to a people, he would get from amongst them some disciples or companions who truly acted upon God's commandments and followed the messenger's example. This would continue for a few generations and then religious fervor would gradually start diminishing. Moral purity preached by the prophet and his companions gradually declines and gives place to degeneration and innovation. (And, as a matter of truth, each innovative addition to Islam replaces an action enunciated by the Qur'an and *Sunnah*.) The later generations of so-called believers have been very aptly described by the Prophet (SAW) thus: "...people

who say what they do not practise and do what they have not been commanded to do." And this is all the more true about we Muslims living in the 15th century after *Hijrah*. Temporally, we are so far removed from the times of the Holy Prophet (SAW) and the Companions (RAA) that there is tremendous deviation from ideal Islam as projected by the teachings of the Qur'an and the Prophet (SAW). And the present *hadith* is a clarion call for changing and stopping all that is disliked and disapproved by the Creator of the universe.

This *hadith* too is a pointer to three levels of *nahee anil-munkar*, exactly in the same manner and order of priority as were delineated by the *hadith* discussed earlier. The three levels are:

1. Struggling against evil and un-Islamic actions with hand;
2. struggling against them with tongue; and
3. struggling against them with heart.

The first two have already been explained in the above paragraphs. Some additional points with respect to the third level should be noted here. Disliking the evil inwardly and struggling against it with one's heart necessarily implies that a true and committed Muslim will not develop warm and close relationship with those indulging in un-Islamic practices. But if he does not do that, he will be generally taken to endorse or accept the un-Islamic practices and thus lose the whole point of his protest against them. Indeed, according to another *hadith* of the Prophet (SAW), such a complacent and "liberal" Muslim gradually ceases to have even passive inward

disapprobation of evil practices, and himself starts indulging in them openly. Serious notice of this point should be taken by all of us. The criterion and the norm for all our likes and dislikes and for all our social relations and friendships should be Islam, and nothing else.

The last assertion of the Prophet (SAW) in the above mentioned *hadith* is particularly noteworthy. The words "...beyond that there is not even a grain of *Iman*" should provide an impetus to all God-fearing Muslims for deep thinking and soul-searching. They should assess their own *Iman* in the light of this *hadith* and should refrain from making a judgment about others. Earlier, in this essay, we have endeavored to state clearly the distinction between Islam and *Iman* and so we can, at this juncture, very well appreciate the point that the *Iman* that is being negated here is the true faith and *Iman* of the heart or inner self. A man failing in the said requirements or performatives would not cease to be a Muslim in the strict legal sense of the term. However, on the Day of Judgment only true inner conviction and *Iman* would be of significance in winning a man his salvation and felicity. It will be the real basis of final loss or gain as we read in Surah Al-Taghabun:

> The Day that He assembles you (all) for a day of Assembly — that will be the day of mutual loss and gain (among you); and those who believe in God and work righteously, He will remove from them their sins and admit them to gardens beneath which rivers flow to dwell therein forever; that will be the supreme achievement (Al-Taghabun 64:9).

The most significant point of the *hadith* should be kept very clearly in mind. The Holy Prophet (SAW) has enjoined upon all Muslims to struggle against evils, in particular those perpetrated and supported by the so-called Muslim rulers and heads of governments in Muslim countries. Since they control the print and electronic media and other influential agencies, they can very effectively promote un-Islamic ideas and practices in the society. In the *hadith*, the Prophet (SAW) has explicitly mentioned the gradual decline of religious and moral fervor particularly in persons at the helm of communal affairs, and has commanded the true believers to reform and correct them. Similarly, religious scholars and spiritual leaders are also covered by this category as they too influence the populace through their teachings and example. And if they go wrong, misconceptions and false notions may spread very widely. As already explained above, this *hadith* behoves all committed and true Muslims to mobilize their resources to the full and employ all the variegated forms of protest and non-violent agitation — rights of which are guaranteed to them by the democratic set-up — to struggle against the evil-mongers and anti-Islam agents. A recourse here to the technicalities of *Khuruj* (i.e., revolt or uprising against the established political authority) is simply besides the point and pure (and idle!) scholastic academicism that kills the dynamism and religious activism required for Islamic revival.